



## Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

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### **“He’ll Never Come To Much”**

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Abraham Lincoln is one of the most revered and prestigious persons in United States history. Americans admire him immensely for his hard work, dedication and honesty. Sometimes though, it is hard to believe that a president so revered had a very typical upbringing.

Abraham was born in a crude one-room log cabin surrounded by a 348-acre farm on February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. He was welcomed into the world by his mother, Nancy, his father, Thomas, and his two year old sister, Sarah. After Abraham was born, his mother gave birth to another child, but he died in infancy.

His cousin, Dennis Hanks, ran all the way to the Lincoln’s cabin when he heard Abe had been born. He held Abe, but the baby soon began crying. “Take him!” Dennis said to his aunt, “He’ll never come (amount) to much!”

After living in Kentucky for two years, Abe and his family moved to another farm, Knob Creek, about ten miles away. This is where Lincoln had his earliest childhood recollections.

As a young boy, Lincoln was very quiet. His cousin, Dennis Hanks described him as a “Bashful, somewhat dull, but peaceable boy,” much like his mother. Abe was also intellectually inclined. He first attended school when he was six, and continued to attend school off and on until he was fifteen years old.

In 1816, when Lincoln was seven, his family moved to Indiana. Not long after, tragedies met up with him when an aunt and uncle died. Even more tragedy came when his mother died in 1818. After enduring an entire year without a wife, Thomas married Sarah Bush, a family friend who was also a widow.

Along with Lincoln's new mother, he also gained three more siblings. Abe's cousin Dennis, who had just lost his mother and father joined with the Lincoln family, making a total of eight family members.

Abe and his new mother bonded instantly. In Sarah's old age she talked to others about Abe, "He was the best boy I ever saw. I never gave him a cross word in all my life." Lincoln's mother encouraged him not only to read, but also to write. Abe would read anything that he could find. He often lay by the fire when his family was sound asleep and wrote down parts of the book that he wanted to memorize. Believe it or not, he would also practice arithmetic by writing on the fire shovel!

By the time Abe was fifteen years old, he stood almost six feet tall. People often commented about his long legs and unbelievable strength. Many said that Lincoln was the best worker in the state of Indiana. It is said that he once picked up a 600 lb. chicken coop and placed it on its new foundation. However, others said he was the laziest worker since he would always stop what he was working on to tell a story or just to say hello to those walking down the street. Of course, Lincoln had something to say about that, "My father taught me to work, but he never taught me to love it."

Unlike many of his peers, Abe often took a book with him when he went to work in the fields. After he returned from a day's work, he read once again. Abe was often heard saying, "My best friend is the man who'll get me a book I ain't read."

Abe rarely read for pleasure, but would often read for information and explanation of politics and American history. After attending Sunday services, Abe could recite the preacher's sermon word for word, or entertain his peers for hours at a time with his stories. At this time, thrilling new books such as *Aesop's Fables* and *Robinson Crusoe* also caught Lincoln's interest.

Some thought there was not a person who could match Lincoln's mind. His mind did not leap straight to solutions, but he struggled with and pondered his ideas. In fact, Abe himself described his mind as, "very hard to scratch anything on it and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it off."

As Lincoln aged, it became more evident that he would "come to much," contrary to what his cousin thought when Lincoln was born. Abe became stronger, wiser, and even kinder with every passing day. People who knew Abe grew to love him for his honesty and his good heart. Even now, in the two-hundredth-year of his birthday, Americans still revere him because of his intelligence, fairness, and perseverance.

In later years, Abe became a lawyer, and then eventually President of the United States, making a mark not only in the history books but in generations to come. In 1865, Lincoln was taken from this world by an assassin. [From Roy Edgar Appleman, *Abraham Lincoln From His Own Words and Contemporary Accounts*; David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln*; Ruth Belov Gross, *True Stories About Abraham Lincoln*; Phillip B. Kunhardt, Jr., Phillip B. Kunhardt, III, Peter W. Kunhardt, *Lincoln*; Stefan Lorant, *The Life Of Abraham Lincoln*; and Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln*.]